REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)* 10-06-2016	2. REPORT TYPE Masters Thesis	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)* 27-07-2015 to 10-06-2016

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Know Yourself, Define Your Enemy: Presidential Rhetoric and American Strategic Culture.**	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S) **Wg Cdr Gareth Prendergast RAF**	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **National Defense University** **Joint Forces Staff College** **Joint Advanced Warfighting School** **7800 Hampton Blvd** **Norfolk, VA. 23511-1702**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Approved for public release, distribution is unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

The power of the president lies in the ability to persuade different audiences. However, the president does not exist within a vacuum and there is an undercurrent of strategic culture that influences the bounds of what he wants to say and what he is expected to say. Whilst there have been studies examining presidential rhetoric previously, there are few studies that consider rhetoric in the context of strategic culture. The use of binaries to reduce or simplify issues is a technique that, whilst not unique to the U.S., sits comfortably within both presidential rhetoric and the strategic culture of the U.S., and is of particular interest.

Four presidents will be examined using the case studies of Iran and North Korea. By using these two countries the examination of rhetoric against strategic culture can be evaluated consistently, rather than exploring a number of different policy areas or issues.

The analysis shows that presidents are constrained in their rhetoric by strategic culture. It is also demonstrated that, whilst reduction to binaries is sometimes politically expedient, the result of error, or the revelation of complexity, can be costly. Moreover, culturally influenced presidential rhetoric has, to some degree, shaped the reality of the U.S. and has considerable implications for the future.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Rhetoric, Strategic Culture, Presidents, Iran, North Korea

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Director of JAWS
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED	UNCLASSIFIED/ UNLIMITED	52	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER *(include area code)* 757-443-6301

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE

JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL

KNOW YOURSELF, DEFINE YOUR ENEMY

Presidential Rhetoric and American Strategic Culture

by

Gareth Prendergast

Wing Commander, Royal Air Force

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Presidential Rhetoric and American Strategic Culture.

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.
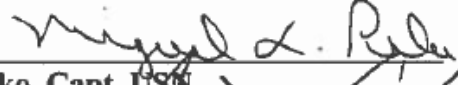
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Abstract

The power of the president lies in the ability to persuade different audiences. However, the president does not exist within a vacuum and there is an undercurrent of strategic culture that influences the bounds of what he wants to say and what he is expected to say. Whilst there have been studies examining presidential rhetoric previously, there are few studies that consider rhetoric in the context of strategic culture. The use of binaries to reduce or simplify issues is a technique that, whilst not unique to the U.S., sits comfortably within both presidential rhetoric and the strategic culture of the U.S., and is of particular interest.

A historical foundation is used to contextualize the discussion with the start of the Cold War acting as an appropriate touchstone for the development and deployment of sophisticated rhetoric and binaries to a mass audience. Four presidents will be examined using the case studies of Iran and North Korea. By using these two countries the examination of rhetoric against strategic culture can be evaluated consistently, rather than exploring a number of different policy areas or issues.

The analysis shows that presidents are constrained in their rhetoric by strategic culture. It is also demonstrated that, whilst reduction to binaries is sometimes politically expedient, the result of error, or the revelation of complexity, can be costly. Moreover, culturally influenced presidential rhetoric has, to some degree, shaped the reality of the U.S. and has considerable implications for the future.

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1. Introduction

The importance of defining one's position in the world is as true for individuals as it is for states. The way that this happens is based upon history, culture, and experiences. American strategic culture, as we will see, is predisposed towards defining the state in opposition to otherness (generally a potential adversary or clearly defined enemy).

This paper will examine the influence of American strategic culture on presidential rhetoric regarding Iran and North Korea over the last thirty years through an examination of the language used. The words recent presidents have used are critical for understanding the sources of actions and motivations. Further, these words will be shown to be based upon the cultural experiences of the United States across its history. Understanding how these historical and cultural narratives place limitations at times on both policy formation and the decision makers allows a more accurate and nuanced discussion in understanding how and why the United States acts in certain situations. It is important to be able to contextualize the limitations that exist in order to predict more accurately how the U.S. may act in the future. The lesson this paper will present is that presidents must understand and be wary of using binary language to describe a complex world, as reductionism rarely paints a complete picture of circumstances and can lead to drastic decisions.

Presidential Rhetoric and Identity

Presidential rhetoric has been explored numerous times in the past, but has generally concentrated on the immediate issues that were being addressed and the rhetorical content at a given point in time, rather than a more fundamental examination of

why rhetoric in general favors binary construction. In the field of communication studies, Craig Smith and Kathy Smith explore presidential rhetoric as persuasion, whilst Kevin Coe examines the role of the press in "echoing" presidential speeches.[1] Cade Hamilton has examined the way that three presidents considered the development of an atomic weapon by North Korea, basing his ideas on three strategies that he perceived to be used by each: compliance, negotiation, and verification. Charles Pritchard recognizes that certain rhetorical descriptions can have significant deleterious effects on relationships without necessarily recognizing the underlying factors that create a binary environment.[2]

Colleen Shogun writes on the moral dimension of presidential rhetoric, identifying several historic examples where presidents have employed moral language to galvanize the home audience or influence external actors. She bases this discussion on the political circumstances that influence these choices and how rhetoric influences the institutional development of the executive branch.[3]

David Campbell and Michael Kammen are two authors who have written books concerning identity formation from ideas of self and otherness from a subjective viewpoint, but their approach tends to look more generally at identity influencing foreign policy.[4]

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[1] Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith, *The White House Speaks: Presidential Leadership as Persuasion* (CT: Praeger, 1994) and Kevin Coe et al, No Shades of Gray: The Binary Discourse of George W. Bush and an Echoing Press, *Journal of Communication,* 54, no. 2, (June, 2004): 234-252.
[2] Charles Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy the Tragic Story of how North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington D.C. Brookings, 2007), 17
[3] Colleen J. Shogan, The Moral Rhetoric of American Presidents (Texas A&M: University Press, 2006).
[4] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minnesota: University Press, 1992) and Michael G. Kammen, *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (Cornell: University Press, 1980)

Strategic culture and, specifically, the American founding documents will be used as the 'golden thread' that connects the content of presidential rhetoric and how it is used. Colin Gray's writings are a basis for this thread with the definition of strategic culture proposed by Jeannie Johnson and Jeffrey Larson being used, albeit accepting that there is no universally accepted definition.[5] There will be additional considerations which address the nature of liberal democracies, the implications for likelihood of conflict, the importance of the audience of rhetoric, and consequences for the future. This paper will examine presidential rhetoric as a reflection of strategic culture, as a means of persuasion, and as a powerful, but sometimes self-defeating weapon.

Presidential Speeches

Public papers from the online presidential libraries have been used to compile speeches from four presidents: Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, William J. Clinton, and George W. Bush. Through each of the libraries a search has been conducted looking for any publically spoken reference to either Iran or North Korea. These sources were then examined for elements particular to American strategic culture, with particular focus on binary constructs, and attention paid to the broader context of audience, as well as the national and international political environment.

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[5] Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (New York: Oxford, 1999) and Colin Gray, "Strategy in the Nuclear Age: The U.S., 1945-1991," in *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War.* ed. Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (Cambridge: University Press, 1994); Jeannie Johnson and Jeffrey Larson, *"Comparative Strategic Cultures Syllabus"*, report prepared for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (Washington D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 20, 2006), 3.

2. The Language of Strategic Culture

Since the end of the Cold War, the connection between strategic culture and presidential rhetoric in analyzing choices for decision making has never been fully explored.

Whilst implied, there is relatively little literature that discusses language specifically as related to strategic culture. A satisfactory definition for strategic culture is:

> … that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives, that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.[1]

Strategic culture is reflected in language and rhetoric. Language as an expression of the collective identity of a national group is important in self-definition, while also framing the context for describing otherness (those who are not included within the group's self-definition). Leaders employ rhetoric and language to broadcast key terms for internal and external audiences that serve as signals, landmarks, or connotations intended to arouse, excite, provoke, warn, or justify. This rhetoric can act as a lens that distorts reality into an unchanging absolute as a means of shaping a particular perspective, thus serves the leader's intent.[2]

Colin Gray's assessment of American strategic culture can be summarized as: the confidence of overcoming all obstacles through expertise and technology, along with an inherent sense of unimpeachable virtue rewarded with success. Promotion of American virtue is the belief in freedom and democracy as the universal standard for mankind.

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[1] Johnson and Larson, *Comparative Strategic Cultures Syllabus*, 3.
[2] Campbell, *Writing Security*, 25.

American strategic culture is based on the unimpeachable belief that the proper

combination of the vast reserve of American resources, applied with virtuous intentions

of advancing freedom and democracy, will result in success. [3]

This is particularly the case when examining the combination of strategic culture

in the post-Cold War period, and the use of binaries with the influence of modern

technology. What can be a strength when a binary position is taken can also be a

weakness when that position is overly-simplified and can no longer – if it ever did –

explain the strategic or political reality.

What Gray does not recognize in his approach is how binary language is an

elemental part of American strategic culture and predisposes presidential rhetoric towards

binary language. These binaries have included; Virtue vs Vice, Reason vs Passion, and

Freedom vs Tyranny, which are classical examples that have existed in the American

consciousness from the 18th century and were key in the understanding of the Founding

Fathers towards the nature of the state and humanity. The maxim "no longer virtuous, no

longer free" from eighteenth century America indicated a desire to subordinate passion to

reason; enlightened self-interest over self-indulgence.[4] For Franklin and Madison, selfish

human nature could be utilized for the long-term success of the common good through

consciously striving to live virtuously.[5] For those with a positive view of human nature,

such as Jefferson, wickedness reigned when men allowed their passions to run amok. A

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[3] Gray, *Strategy in the Nuclear Age*, 590-591.
[4] Jack P. Greene, "The Concept of Virtue in Late Colonial America" in *Virtue, Corruption, and Self-interest: Political Values in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Richard K Matthews (PA: Bethlehem, 1994), 27-54 and Alfred O Aldridge, Franklin's 'Shaftsburian' Dialogues Not Franklin's, in *American Literature*, 21, (May 1949), 151-159.
[5] Daniel W. Howe, *Making the American Self: Johnathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 37.

harmonious integration of reason and emotion in the individual in turn created a harmonious society.[6]

These concepts are replicated when one looks at the founding documents of the United States. The Declaration of Independence states that certain truths are "self-evident" and that there are the "unalienable rights", "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."[7] The preamble to the Constitution intends "a more perfect union," the establishment of "justice," and the securing of the "blessings of Liberty."[8] These binaries were used not only to justify independence, but also served as a thread through the Constitution to ensure a reasoned government with checks and balances to assure democracy. The binary Progress vs Stagnation can be seen through the conquering of the west and a belief in the transformative power of technology, which are two key factors in Colin Gray's description of American strategic culture. Finally, the binary of Just vs Unjust, is a driver in the belief in U.S. liberal democracy and its power to punish injustice and restore a rightful order. This was most dramatically utilized during the Second World War and Cold War, but has also been employed in more recent years. The components of strategic culture and the binaries that are derived from this self-definition are profoundly important to American identity and frame the parameters within which all American presidents work.

Whilst binaries have been employed by actors across many disciplines, the American presidency offers a fascinating insight into how this tool has been used. As the

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[6] Jefferson to William Green Munford, June 18, 1799, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1064.
[7] The Declaration of Independence
[8] U.S. Constitution, Preamble.

primary articulator of foreign policy, the president plays a role whose rhetorical power comes from persuasion.[9] Presidential rhetoric informs the domestic audience, the actor targeted by the message and the wider international community.

The Cold War reinforced the norms of American strategic culture and made these traditional binaries far more obvious in a bi-polar world. President Eisenhower established a Cold War rhetorical discourse claiming America's "aspirations for peace" and "hatred of war."[10] In most respects, the Eisenhower administration was re-tooling the traditional language of American strategic culture for the Cold War rather than establishing a new norm. The growing importance of media, particularly broadcasting addresses to the nation on television, and the use of services like Radio Free Europe to reach audiences behind the Iron Curtain, enabled rhetoric to reach far wider audiences and solidify the differences between the democratic West and totalitarian Communism. The American public also became a primary target for this rhetoric. An "energetic and aroused, if not fully informed public" was a goal, through the use of "symbolic inducements, replete with a Manichaean world view and a rhetoric of redemption."[11] This, however, was not a period of pure manipulation; Eisenhower truly believed in the threat posed by Communism and wished to galvanize the American people as well as convey the message of American righteousness internationally.[12] That at times this was

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[9] Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership from FDR to Carter* (New York: John Wiley, 1980), 10.
[10] Martin J. Medhurst, "Eisenhower and the Crusade for Freedom: The Rhetorical Origins of a Cold War Campaign", in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 27, no. 3, (Fall, 1977): 646-661; Martin J. Medhurst, *Dwight D Eisenhower: Strategic Communicator* (CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 141-144.
[11] Medhurst, Eisenhower and the Crusade for Freedom, 658.
[12] Ibid, 660.

abused should not detract from the initial intent. Indeed, this further highlights the philosophical connection to the Founding Fathers and American strategic culture.

As a strategy, rhetoric was useful at the outset of the Cold War as it was able to mask covert activity.[13] A fear of assisting the enemy if information was publicly discussed took advantage of the principle of confidentiality to preserve national security. The Eisenhower administration introduced this idea of rhetoric to serve multiple audiences, and this approach was expanded by the Kennedy administration based on the premise that ordinary people were not equipped to understand the finer points of foreign policy or the reasons why the U.S. was compelled to act in a cold blooded manner for the purposes of national security.[14] The unintended consequences of this approach was to make the use of stark binaries easier. If the public was less informed, it was easy to reduce policy to a binary of "Freedom vs Slavery." Given these conditions, it was not difficult to foresee the consequences this rhetoric had for the Kennedy administration's policy on Vietnam. A war initially described as a moral conflict of great importance based on a principle of freedom, removed complex issues of decolonization and geopolitical influence from the debate.[15] The leadership had unwittingly tied America's credibility to the fate of South Vietnam. Trapped in this binary of stopping the advance of communism, or defeat, the United States redoubled its commitment in Vietnam long after the strategic logic had been disproved. Subsequent administrations had to disentangle

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[13] Medhurst, "Eisenhower and the Crusade for Freedom", 658.
[14] Philip Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 350.
[15] Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig, "Idealism and Pragmatism in American Foreign Policy Rhetoric: The case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam", in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 24, no 3, Conduct of Foreign Policy (Summer 1994): 515-530.

from the rhetoric when its short-term goals collided with the realities of the conflict, but only after an enormous loss of American lives.[16]

Taking the historical, cultural, and rhetorical consequences of binary language allows one to understand the strengths and limitations of presidential diplomacy. The structure of the language along with the choice of words, when viewed through this lens, provides an important perspective that helps to better characterize and explain the decision making choices of an administration.

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[16] Richard J. Walton, *Cold War and Counterrevolution: The Foreign Policy of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Viking, 1972), 201.

3. The Waning of the Cold War

President Reagan: Containment and Deterrence vs Dialogue and Understanding

Ronald Reagan's term signaled a renewal of American strength and power. The release of the American hostages in Iran after 444 days of captivity as the president took office was an omen that the perceived period of inaction under President Jimmy Carter was over. The roll-back of the Soviet Union, and promotion of military programs such as the Strategic Defense Initiative and the B-1 bomber, indicated an intention to become pro-active.[1] The Reagan administration consciously articulated characteristics of American strategic culture. High-tech programs for the military and reinforcement of liberal democratic (and capitalist) ideals for the world, was marked by a return to a more aggressive Cold War rhetoric. These prescriptions can be easily mapped to Colin Gray's factors of U.S. strategic culture, particularly the fascination with technology, a sense of innate virtue and a belief in the inevitability of the success of American liberal democracy.[2]

Addressing the 42nd session of the UN General Assembly, President Reagan highlighted these factors of American strategic culture along with a revival of the Cold War rhetoric employing the binary of freedom and democracy vs communist tyranny:

> I recognize that some governments represented in this hall have other ideas. Some do not believe in democracy or in political, economic or religious freedom. Some believe in dictatorship. . . . To those governments I would only say that the price of oppression is clear . . . . Your people will become restless. Isn't it better to listen to the people's hopes now rather than their curses later?[3]

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[1] William E. Pemberton, *Exit with Honor: The Life and Presidency of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 108.

[2] Gray, *Strategy in the Nuclear Age*, 590-591.

[3] Address to the 42nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York, September 21, 1987, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/publicpapers.html#.VoR8zY-cFaQ (accessed 5 September 2015).

Further, in a speech on Human Rights Day in 1988, Reagan turned to the Cold War binary, stating that U.S. human rights policy "should not yield slavery when what it promised was freedom."[4] It was in this context that the Cold War rhetoric would be directed not just to the USSR, but to Iran and North Korea. The Iranian revolution had established a theocratic state actively opposing the West (and the U.S. in particular) and seeking to export its revolution into the Middle East. North Korea, a semi-dependent communist dictatorship, had been the focus of American containment and commitment to security in Asia for over 30 years.

President Reagan began to target Iran as an active threat to U.S. interests and highlighted critical differences between the two countries using a binary construct. On January 27 1981, seven days after the release of the hostages, Reagan stated, "truth may be a rare commodity today in Iran; it's alive and well in America."[5] Two days later Reagan used a different binary of order vs disorder when, at a news conference, he was questioned on relations with Iran and whether there would be revenge or reconciliation in the aftermath of the hostage crisis. The President stated that the U.S. would not seek revenge, but also that reconciliation would be difficult due to the "absence of a government... in Iran."[6] This rhetoric established a perception of chaos in Iran created by an unjust government of theocrats. This approach would be used throughout the Reagan presidency. Indeed, when a stable government had been established in Iran, normalization

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[4] Remarks on Signing the Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week Proclamation December 8, 1988, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan,* Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
[5] Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for the freed American Hostages January 27, 1981, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
[6] The President's News Conference January 29, 1981, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

of relations with the Iranian government was prevented by the president extending

Executive Order 12170, which had declared a national emergency in Iran.[7]

        The outbreak of the Iraq-Iran War in 1980 allowed the president to place Iran as a

pariah state and to continue to build an anti-Iran narrative, creating a threat on par with

the USSR. "Our role in this war [Iraq-Iran] is neutral, and we do not seek to confront

Iran. However, its leaders must understand that continued military and terrorist attacks

against non-belligerents and refusal to negotiate an end to the war will be very costly to

Iran and its people."[8] When asked who the enemy was in the Persian Gulf, the President

responded that with regard to rules of war, "Iraq had not gone beyond bounds, as Iran had

done."[9] Even though Iraq had initiated the war and later used chemical weapons, the U.S.

officially maintained its position of Iraq following the rules of war against an

unprincipled Iran.

        In 1985, President Reagan took a further step in using rhetoric to isolate Iran by

identifying it as a "terrorist state."[10] Moreover, Reagan described Iran as "criminal."[11]

Reagan's addition to the Cold War rhetoric was the theme of terrorism which reflected a

growing concern for this new threat to national security. By August 1988 it was possible

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[7] Notice of the Continuation of the Iran Emergency November 4, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Executive Order 12170 declared the situation in Iran as an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and the economy of the United States. It established a block on all property and interests in property of the Government of Iran, instrumentalities and controlled entities and the Central Bank of Iran which are or become subject to the jurisdiction of the United States or which are in or come in control of persons subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.

[8] Radio Address to the Nation on the Trade Bill and the Persian Gulf Conflict April 23, 1988, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[9] Interview with Television Correspondents Representing Nations Attending the London Economic Summit May 31, 1984, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[10] Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Bar Association July 8, 1985, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[11] Ibid.

for the U.S. to state that its policy in the Persian Gulf was to "stand firm against Iranian aggression."[12] Binary constructs towards Iran were further highlighted in December 1988, when the president described Iran as a "totalitarian dungeon."[13] This is one of the most obvious examples of Reagan using binary language to characterize Iran. This is a unique description echoing the rhetoric of the Cold War and establishing a distinct position with no middle ground.

President Reagan's rhetoric creating the Cold War binaries of Slavery vs Freedom, Order vs Disorder, and Democracy vs Totalitarian Theocracy against Iran returned to haunt the president, hampering his efforts to negotiate with Iran over sensitive issues. The late 1980s saw the Reagan administration embroiled in the Iran-Contra affair. These were allegations that arms had been transferred to Iran to secure the release of hostages held in Lebanon, through a third party, but that the money to pay for the weapons was not fully accounted for in the U.S. Some of the funds had been redirected to the Contras to support them in their fight against the Marxist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. This was a violation of U.S. law and reduced the public standing of the president. It is ironic that a purpose behind the affair was to improve relations with Iran but allowed the Iranians to claim a victory over the U.S. This exposed Reagan's rhetoric as less than authentic. A disconnect between actions and rhetoric created a confused space where one could see the complexities of the world beyond the binary construct that Reagan had built since 1980. This event reflected activity that the Eisenhower

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[12] Radio Address to the Nation on Foreign Policy Achievements August 27, 1988, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Of particular relevance was the Iranian threat to Gulf oil shipments.
[13] Remarks on Signing the Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week Proclamation December 8, 1988 *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

administration participated in, particularly the use of rhetoric to mask covert activities. The Iran-Contra affair repeated this and, as Eisenhower was with the Gary Powers U-2 scandal, Reagan became exposed and humiliated.[14]

Reagan also applied Cold War binaries to a long-time foe employing them far more easily and effectively than the same binaries had been used against Iran. In November 1983, President Reagan conducted a tour of Korea and Japan where he gave a number of speeches. The North Koreans had just been identified as the perpetrators of an attack on Republic of Korea politicians in Burma. The President used the incident to describe North Korea's attack as an act of terror.[15]

Like Iran, North Korea was associated with sponsoring terrorism and three days later in another speech, Reagan began employing rhetoric in clear Cold War binary terms. Comparing South and North Korea's economic output he went on to state: "the true division in the world today is not between east and west, but between progress and stagnation, between freedom and oppression, between hope and despair."[16] The tour of Asia continued with more of the same rhetoric. The President spoke of "America's pride in joining with the Korean people to prevent their enslavement by the North" and furthering this binary rhetoric in a later speech he said, "People who are free will not be slaves, and freedom will not be lost in the Republic of Korea."[17] At a state dinner, Reagan spoke of the "progress" of South Korea as contrasted with the "continuing failure

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[14] Dwight D Eisenhower, *Waging Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 553.
[15] Interview with Jung-suk Lee of the Korean Broadcasting System on the President's Trip to the Republic of Korea November 7, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
[16] Toasts of the President and Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone of Japan at Luncheon in Tokyo November 10, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
[17] Address before the Korean National Assembly in Seoul November 12, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

and moral decline of the Communist nations."[18] He described Communist North Korea as a "radical and totalitarian government. . . . united by one simple criminal phenomenon – their fanatical hatred of the United States, our people, our way of life, our international stature."[19] During the final speech of his 1983 tour of Asia, Reagan accused North Korea of "state terrorism."[20] In 1985, making remarks on the DMZ, Reagan told the assembled troops that they were on "the frontlines of freedom" that the government to the north was based upon "hatred and oppression" and "declares those who worship God to be enemies of the people."[21]This rhetoric served a number of audiences. For the domestic U.S. audience, it fit the internal narrative based on American strategic culture of the inevitability of American success along with reassurance of the vast power that the U.S. wielded to assure eventual victory over an unjust and totalitarian government. To the South Koreans and Asian allies, it reinforced the U.S. commitment to the Cold War policy of containment. The communist states of the USSR, China, and North Korea were the traditional opponents of freedom. For the Reagan administration, use of Cold War binaries was far easier with North Korea, as it fit the overall bipolar confrontation narrative in a way that Iran did not. However, Reagan joined North Korea and Iran together not only as totalitarian dictatorships, but also as states associated with support of terrorism as part of a strategy.

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[18] Toast at the State Dinner in Seoul, Republic of Korea, November 12, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

[19] Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Bar Association, July 8, 1985, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[20] Joint Statement Following Meetings with President Chun Doo Hwan of the Republic of Korea, November 14, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[21] Remarks to American Troops at Camp Liberty Bell, Republic of Korea, November 13, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

The presidential rhetoric stressing "strength is the surest path to peace"[22] was highlighted in 1987, towards the end of his second administration. Reagan stated that he was "encouraging dialogue and understanding" between the two Koreas, but he linked this with "democratic progress," and spoke of "developing understanding, and building confidence."[23] This illustrates the difficulty of reconciling rhetoric with reality. Although peace through strength is a powerful phrase reflecting American strategic culture, the complexities of easing tensions between the two Koreas to bring about a lasting peace could never be based on an assertion of strength by any of the interested parties. Thus, American rhetoric provided no real opportunities for further progress.

By the end of the Reagan presidency, both Iran and North Korea had been characterized as threats to freedom and sponsors of state terrorism. The rhetoric against Iran was more pronounced with no assumption of dialogue whilst the Ayatollah remained in power, and was isolated diplomatically with few allies. The U.S., however, accepted and participated in dialogue with North Korea to de-escalate tensions on the peninsula because North Korea had Communist China and the USSR as sponsors. Despite the strident Cold War rhetoric, it appeared that there was always a chance to engage North Korea. For Iran, as an unaligned state, it was easier for the U.S. to be more bellicose with its rhetoric, as the consequences were negligible. Nevertheless, Iran presented an unusual challenge. Never before had a Middle East state humiliated a superpower by seizing hostages; nor had there ever been a non-communist state so openly hostile to the elements of American national identity.

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[22] Remarks Following Discussions with President Chun Doo Hwan of the Republic of Korea, April 26, 1985, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
[23] Written Responses to Questions Submitted by the Japanese Newspaper Asahi Shimbun, April 28, 1987, *The Public Papers of President Ronald Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

The rhetoric also provided assurance to friendly regimes in the region. But once the binary rhetoric was applied, it was much more difficult to replace with new language. Once declared an enemy, it was difficult to draw back the characterization and create the conditions for discussions. This could, in part, explain the administration's contradictory rhetoric and actions towards Iran through the 1980s.

Reagan's use of rhetoric often appeared to make the world a more dangerous place, making it harder for moderates to find common cause and establish the parameters for negotiation. But Reagan believed that successful negotiating came from a high moral and militarily strong position. Quite counterintuitively, rhetoric was not just words, but a prelude to action to reduce tensions.

For all his powerful rhetoric, exemplifying American strategic culture and its binary constructs perfectly, Reagan was more than willing to set rhetoric aside in favor of negotiations – first with the USSR on IRBMs in Europe, reduction of nuclear warheads in the SALT Treaties, reduction of conventional forces in Europe, approaches to North Korea, and covert contact with Iran.

President H. W. Bush: Good Will Fallacy vs Hope over Experience

As Ronald Reagan's vice president and a former CIA director, George H. W. Bush was fully conversant with the international environment in which the United States operated. As president, Bush would shepherd the world through the end of the Cold War, and bring a peaceful transition from Communism to the establishment of democratic institutions in Eastern Europe and the expansion of NATO.[24]

In the wake of the Iran-Contra affair, and with Americans still held by elements of Hezbollah in Lebanon, President Bush initially set out to characterize U.S. interactions with Iran in terms of mutual self-interest. To secure the release of the captive Americans, the U.S. offered to begin restoring normal relations with Iran. To that end, Bush's initial rhetorical phrasing regarding Iran was one of "good will begets good will."[25] This was coupled with the expectation there would be an Iranian "renunciation of terror."[26] This continued Reagan's narrative of Iran as a terror state, but also held out an opportunity to change the Cold War binary construct of Freedom vs Tyranny. This was an unusual step as it did not conform to the binary elements of American strategic culture. Practical policies may have led President Bush in this direction, but the U.S. domestic audience displayed difficulty with the concept of good will begets good will. The incompatibility of such language with American strategic culture, and in particular the binary language of the Cold War, created both rhetorical and policy problems for George H. W. Bush.

Iran did its part to cloud the Bush approach as well. When Iran issued a fatwa

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[24] David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 10

[25] Inaugural Address, 18 January, 1989, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library 1989-1991 at https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/ (accessed 5 September 2015).

[26] The Presidents News Conference, 27 January, 1989, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

against author Salman Rushdie for blasphemy, the Bush administration equated this open threat to free speech and conscience as terrorism, declaring that "inciting murder [and its] perpetration are deeply offensive to the norms of civilized behavior. And our position on terrorism is well known."[27] If he had approached this incident in the same context Reagan did in his initial statements about Iran as a denier of rights and freedom, Bush would have been on more solid ground rhetorically and would have been firmly compatible with American strategic culture. However, the choice of terrorism, while perhaps more potent rhetorically, clashed directly with Bush's reciprocal good will approach. If a non-U.S. citizen was assassinated, yet all Americans released, would this beget good will? Further, how could a state that acted contrary to civilized behavior be associated in good will with the U.S.? With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989, the president repeated his statement for the Americans to be released. President Bush made his position clear: "They have been a terrorist state. And as soon as we see some move away from oppression and extremism of that nature, we will review our relationship."[28]

Two months later, the new Iranian president, Rafsanjani, made an overture to the U.S. to help resolve the situation of American captives in Lebanon. The president now found himself in a quandary. His position of not negotiating with terrorists put him at odds with his wish to complete "an extraordinarily broad exercise of diplomacy [with

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[27] Lisa Appignanesi, and Sara Maitland, *The Rushdie File* (Syracuse: University Press, 1989), 67. Salman Rushdie authored the book *The Satanic Verses* which was interpreted by the Ayatollah as offensive to Islam and insulting to the Prophet. The Presidents News Conference, 21 February, 1989, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.
[28] The President's News Conference, 5 June, 1989 *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

Iran].”[29] The desire to disincentivize kidnapping American citizens by not appearing to

reward the kidnappers was contradictory to a statement he made that the U.S. was “going

to every possible end to try to find – get the return of these Americans to their loved

ones”[30] Across the next eight months, the good will begets good will trope resurfaced in a

number of interviews and speeches.[31] The problem of dealing with a “terror state” that

had influence, but not control, over those holding American hostages placed the

administration in a difficult position.

This singular focus on Iran, combined with the mixed message of building good

will with a declared terrorist state, placed the president in the same rhetorical difficulties

that had ensnared President Reagan. It reduced the strategic environment and ignored the

reality that Iran was not responsible for freeing the Americans, yet Bush continued to

present the situation as a U.S. – Iran issue to the American public and to the wider

Middle East. Indeed, when the first Americans were released, it was understood to be

from the influence of Syria, related to the release of Shi’ite prisoners in Europe and

Israel.[32]

Unsurprisingly, the question of whether this release was an example of good will

surfaced immediately, particularly with regard to whether a lack of reciprocity would

make future releases unlikely. Bush found himself caught in the trap of his own rhetoric.

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[29] Remarks on Receiving Proposed Line-Item Veto Legislation and a Question and Answer Session with Reporters, 4 August, 1989, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.
[30] Ibid.
[31] The President’s News Conference 7 November, 1989, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library and News Conference of President Bush and President Francois Mitterand of France in Key Largo, Florida, 9 April, 1990, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library as two examples.
[32] Nick B. Williams, “American Hostage Polihill Freed by Beirut Kidnapers”, LA Times, 23 April 1990. http://articles.latimes.com/1990-04-23/news/mn-102_1_very-happy-man (accessed 8 September 2015).

It appeared that good will meant negotiations with a terrorist state and a prisoner swap. Bush's frustration was revealed in a meeting with the press: "I'm not making gestures. I don't trade for hostages. I don't go 'ante up' one step and one another. . . . American policy is sound, and it's not going to change."[33]

This lack of binary discourse had little recognizable relation to American strategic culture, particularly after years of Cold War rhetoric. Thus, Bush's hopeful and optimistic rhetoric fell afoul of the more potent rhetoric of a terrorism.

President Bush had a far more successful response to the Persian Gulf crisis in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Here, the president was able to establish the binary of Just vs Unjust supporting nearly all of the elements of American strategic culture. It also promoted national unity by engaging in a righteous cause which, in turn, served the claim that victory in the Gulf War had finally vanquished the ghost of defeat in Vietnam.

In the aftermath of the rapid victory against Iraq, President Bush returned again to relations with Iran. This time his approach was compatible with American strategic culture. In June 1991, he declared a desire to "see a free Iran full of human rights where we can have better relations again."[34] The same rhetoric expressing a "hope for better relations" with a free and democratic Iran dependent upon the Iranians influencing the release of the remaining American captives was used throughout the summer of 1991.[35]

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[33] Remarks on the Release of Former Hostage Robert Polhill and an Exchange with Reporters, 22 April, 1990, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

[34] Remarks to the Asian Pacific Community in Fountain Valley California, 16 June, 1991, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

[35] Remarks on Assistance for Iraqi Refugees and a News Conference, 16 April 1991, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

The release of hostage Edward Tracy in August, however, did not change the rhetoric of

improved relations in return for releasing the remaining Americans.[36] When the

remaining Americans were released, in December 1991, President Bush was asked a

direct question regarding his earlier statement that good will begets good will, and how

close the U.S. was to restoring ties. The President's response was revealing: "Not closer

at this moment. I don't consider this chapter closed because I think of [Mr Buckley and

Colonel Higgins]. I'd like to see [their] remains returned."[37] Thus, in the end, the U.S.

could not pursue better relations as a result of the release of the American captives. It

violated the fundamentals of American strategic culture and negated important rhetorical

binaries established since Ronald Reagan. This clouding of the narrative allowed

President Bush to return to the binaries periodically even though he pursued a different

rhetorical approach addressing an immediate short-term concern for the safety and

welfare of American captives in Lebanon.

If the Iranian relationship was characterized as a time offering false hope,

President Bush's rhetoric towards North Korea continued Ronald Reagan's theme of

"Peace through Strength," coupled with a goal for "peaceful unification on terms

acceptable to Korean people."[38] The unification, of course, was based on U.S. national

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[36] Exchange in Kennebunkport, Maine with Reporters Following the Release of American Hostage Edward Tracy, 11 August, 1991, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

[37] The President's News Conference, 5 December 1991, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library. Mr Buckley and Colonel Higgins were both kidnapped, tortured and murdered by pro-Iranian Shiite groups in 1985 and 1989 respectively. Buckley was the CIA station chief in Lebanon, at the Beirut Embassy. Colonel Higgins was part of the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon. Their deaths were claimed to be related to Israeli action: an airstrike in Lebanon and the seizing of Sheik Abdel Karim Obeid, a Muslim Cleric with Hezbollah. The killers have never been identified.

[38] Remarks to the National Assembly in Seoul, 27 February, 1989, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

interests driven by the American strategic culture. President Bush characterized the outcome of unifications as "the development of democratic political institutions [being] the surest means to build national consensus that is the foundation of true security."[39] This rhetoric further reinforced the binary nature of the United States and South Korea, two free democracies, against North Korea's totalitarianism. President Bush continued the theme of the inevitability of freedom when he stated that the Korean conflict created "the conditions for the tide toward democracy now changing and uplifting our globe."[40]

Over the course of his presidency, Bush invoked the Korean War to mark out the inevitable success of the American way along with the principles of "independence, peace, and democracy."[41] This praise of South Korea as a model of democracy suited the Cold War binary in opposition to North Korea and served many presidents, despite the fact that until 1987, South Korea had been oscillating between authoritarian rule and military regime.[42] The President's rhetorical claim of "our defense of freedom laid the foundation for the march of democracy" clearly supported the American strategic culture and the President accomplished this with relative ease.[43]

But in 1991, President Bush found himself trapped by his own rhetoric on North Korea, even as his rhetoric was trapping him in his approach to Iran. The United States needed to deal with the likelihood that North Korea had broken its commitments under

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[39] Ibid

[40] Remarks at the unveiling Ceremony for the Design of the Korean War Memorial, 14 June, 1989, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

[41] Remarks Following Discussions With President Roh Tae Woo of the Republic of Korea, 17 October, 1989, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

[42] Jinwung Kim, *A History of Korea* ,(Indiana: University Press, 2012)

[43] Remarks at a Fundraising Dinner for the Korean War Veterans Memorial Commission, January 5, 1990, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.

the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty attempting to develop nuclear weapons.[44] The President had to tread carefully between going too far in the binary Cold War rhetoric that would increase tensions between the two Koreas and making a similar good will begets good will approach to North Korea. In an effort to contain the situation and deescalate, Bush promised to "support the security aspirations of its ally in the South in the cause of peace," and later described North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons as the "greatest source of danger to peace in all of northeast Asia."[45] Yet at the same time, the administration held out the carrot to North Korea that if it abided by international agreements and discontinued its nuclear technology research, the U.S. military exercises in Korea would be cancelled.[46] In the case of both Iran and North Korea, President Bush found himself hoist with his own petard. His conciliatory approach was negated by the rhetoric he chose, creating confusion with his domestic audience and sending a mixed message to the leadership of Iran and North Korea.

Buoyed by the demise of the Soviet Union, President Bush took the opportunity to predict that "the tragedy of totalitarianism has entered its final scene everywhere on earth."[47] Bush asserted in a triumphant speech to Congress in 1992, that "America won the Cold War."[48] The realization of a core element of American strategic culture of virtue assuring victory was intoxicating and led to significant literature describing the triumph

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[44] Ted G. Carpenter & Doug Bandow, *The Korean Conundrum: America's Troubled Relations with North and South Korea*, (New York: Macmillan), 40.
[45] Remarks to the Korean Assembly in Seoul, 6 January 1992, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Remarks to the Pearl Harbour Survivors Association in Honolulu, Hawaii, 7 December 1991, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush*, George Bush Presidential Library.
[48] George H. W Bush, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, 1992-93*. 2 vols. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1993), 156-157

of liberal democracy and the end of history.[49] This was the triumphant rhetoric of the fulfilment of American strategic culture.

Although it appeared that all of the binaries has been validated, they had not. A new president would encounter a multitude of new crises where the traditional rhetorical binaries were more difficult to apply and the tenets of American strategic culture appeared less certain in the post-Cold War world.

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[49] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (New York: Free Press, 1992)

4. The End of History to the Global War on Terror

President Clinton: A President de-Kanted

With the end of the Cold War, William Jefferson Clinton was arguably elected because he framed the incumbent as out of touch with domestic affairs having spent so much time on foreign issues.[1] The reality was that ethnic, religious, territorial, and ideological rivalries were emerging to create a complex environment where traditional conceptions and definitions were no longer applicable.

Clinton's desire was to see "Iran. . . continue [to abide] by international law."[2] His Iran policy was based upon three concerns: Iran's support of terrorism; the proliferation of WMD, particularly nuclear technology, and Iran's role as an impediment to the wider Middle East peace process. In March 1993, Clinton resisted connecting Iranians with the World Trade Center bombing, in spite of pressure to do so.[3] Although this did not preclude him from identifying Iran as an agent of "terrorism and assassination" just four months later.[4] Thus, the president did not abandon the approach of Reagan and Bush completely. Iran and terrorism combined with Freedom vs Tyranny was still a useful binary to contrast to international, rather than purely American principles. Clinton's approach was a move away from U.S. unilateralism, per se, towards internationalism, based upon international law and human rights. Whilst Clinton stated that, where

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[1] Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 212

[2] The President's News Conference with Prime Minister Ciampi of Italy, September 17, 1993, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library at https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=PPP&browsePath=president-57&isCollapsed=true&leafLevelBrowse=false&ycord=0 (accessed 5 September 2015).

[3] Interview with Dan Rather of CBS News, March 24, 1993, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.

[4] Interview with Larry King, July 20, 1993, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.

necessary, the U.S. would act by itself it would endeavor, where possible, to convince

other nations of the correctness of American policy as "all Western nations. . . . have an

overriding interest in containing the threat posed by Iran."[5] Further, this new

internationalism was connected with binary language where "at the end of the 20th

century. . . . we face a great battle of the forces of integration against the forces of

disintegration, of globalism versus tribalism, of oppression against empowerment."[6] This

blend of U.S. strategic culture and internationalism had echoes of Cold War rhetoric, but

also added a new unfamiliar theme (at least to the U.S. public) of international norms and

human rights. Commonly held values were stated as of the same importance as the

national interest. In this respect, Clinton's rhetoric towards Iran was less directly

belligerent and avoided the snares of rhetoric that entangled President Bush. Particularly

with regard to terrorism and WMD, the rhetoric focused on law enforcement agencies

and bringing criminals to justice along with a seriously expressed desire to see Iran

establish a "good democracy".[7]

 The Clinton administration maintained the rhetoric used by President Bush,

following the dual approach of support to South Korea's defense, while advocating

reunification with certain conditions. As the President stated at the demilitarized zone,

[5] Remarks to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee Policy Conference, May 7, 1995, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.
[6] Remarks at the Seventh Millennium Evening at the White House, April 12, 1999, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.
[7] The President's News Conference With European Union Leaders in London, United Kingdom, May 18, 1998, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.and Interview with Wolf Blitzer on CNN.com, February 14, 2000, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.

"it's clear that the people of South Korea would like reunification to be possible, if you can preserve democracy and freedom."[8]

When North Korea threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Clinton administration continued to avoid the binary rhetoric of Freedom vs Totalitarianism, or U.S. defense of commitment to South Korea. Instead, the U.S. focused on the support of international treaty obligations. Clinton stressed in a statement that the U.S. "will continue to press the North Koreans strongly to comply fully with international standards."[9]

Clinton signaled this rhetoric of international norms linked to American strategic culture as part of a larger global standard of universal values in a speech given to the 48th Session of the UN General Assembly in 1993:

> [The] habits of democracy are the habits of peace. Democracy is rooted in compromise, not conquest. It rewards tolerance, not hatred.… In democracies with the rule of law and respect for political, religious, and cultural minorities are more responsive to their own people and the protection of human rights.[10]

Here Clinton places the ideals of American strategic culture within a larger set of norms and values. "[T]he ideas we struggle for, democracy and freedom. . . . these ideas are more and more the ideals of humanity."[11]

Clinton's rhetoric also started to subtly change its emphasis from states acting in pursuit of national interests to "rogue states" operating outside the international system of

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[8] Exchange with Reporters at the Demilitarized Zone, 11 July, 1993, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.
[9] Statement on Nuclear Nonproliferation Talks With North Korea, 11 June, 1993, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.
[10] Remarks to the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, 27 September, 1993, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.
[11] Remarks to the Community in Detroit, 22 October, 1996, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.

norms, and trans-national actors who posed new threats to peace and security through terrorism, drug trafficking, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation.[12]

As the sun started to fade on the Clinton administration in 2000, the frustrations of the turmoil of the post-Cold War world led the President to be less confident in purely international approaches. Clinton admitted that "we don't understand people who are different than [sic] us. And it's easy when you don't fully understand people not to trust them."[13] President Clinton reversed President Bush's rhetoric hailing the inevitability of democracy: "I don't think that freedom is inevitable or the triumph of democracy is inevitable. But I think it is rendered far more likely by the power of our example and the strength of our engagement."[14] The approach to both Iran and North Korea was one characterized by a desire to apply international rules and norms to discourage them from being "rogue" states.

The Clinton administration used rhetoric to achieve aims as part of an international community sharing common interests and values. He avoided the rhetorical binaries that had been used by presidents since the beginning of the Cold War. By doing so, he subsumed American strategic culture into a broader, more universal, construct. But, this had costs for American strategic interests. By refusing to draw a clean rhetorical line, President Clinton was unable to determine what situations required the U.S. to act in

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[12] Remarks on International Security Issues at George Washington University, 5 August, 1996; *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library and Remarks to the 52d Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, 22 September, 1997, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.

[13] Remarks at a dinner for Governor Gary Locke of Washington and Representative Jay Inslee in Seattle, 14 October, 2000, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.

[14] Interview with the New York Times, 30 November, 2000, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: William J Clinton*, William J Clinton Presidential Library.

its own interests. Indeed, at times his administration appeared as bystanders to

international events whilst cautiously identifying the most politically expedient

solution.[15]

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[15] Samantha Power, "Bystanders to Genocide", *The Atlantic,* September 2001. http://www.theatlantic.com/ magazine/archive/2001/09/bystanders-to-genocide/304571/ (accessed March 24, 2016).

President G.W. Bush: Blessed are the War Makers

The beginning of the George W. Bush presidency in 2001 indicated that there would be little change from the approach of the Bush and Clinton administrations: Iran (and other rogue states) were to be challenged for their "support for terrorism, opposition to the Middle East peace process, and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction."[16] The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 altered his rhetorical dynamic, revived the binary language of the Cold War and recalled the strident visions of a new world order. President Bush spoke in stark terms: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[17] Here was American strategic culture expressed in the most absolute binary.

The famous use of the rhetorical devices of the "Axis of Evil" and the "War on Terrorism" clearly placed Iraq, Iran and North Korea in a condition of unambiguous threat not only to the U.S., but to the world order.[18] These three states were further connected by the themes of terrorism and WMD proliferation. Terrorism became akin to a kind of aggression that required a response through war. This new sense of 'otherness' with the radical Muslim world and totalitarian enemies in the far East suited a return to the language of the Cold War and the easy binaries associated with it. Bush's speech

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[16]Statement on Signing the ILSA Extension Act of 2001, 3 August, 2001, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library at https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action? collectionCode=PPP&browsePath=president-57&isCollapsed=true&leafLevelBrowse=false&ycord=0 (accessed 5 September 2015). For similarities with previous Clinton policy and the seeming drift prior to 9/11 see Derek Chollet, and James Goldgeir, *America Between the Wars From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 311

[17] Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 20 September, 2001, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library.

[18] Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, 29 January, 2002, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library

outlined specific binaries imbued with the language of American strategic culture. Use of words like "evil" immediately set the parameters for how the U.S. would respond to these states. While other presidents (including his father) had pursued a conciliatory approach to bring Iran into the family of nations, George W. Bush placed Iran beyond the pale, stating that Iran "aggressively pursues these weapons [WMD] and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom."[19] Bush invoked the most powerful elements of American strategic culture, evoking Woodrow Wilson's war to save the world for democracy and Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech. Bush vowed to oppose the tyrannical regimes "that hate freedom and kill in the name of religion. . . . And this President is not going to allow regimes… to threaten our way of life."[20]

Bush's rhetoric also unambiguously declared that the U.S. was once again the leader of the free world.[21] As the leader of an international coalition, Bush, fully believing every word of his rhetoric, went out in search of monsters to destroy. Enemies were found and identified and would be transformed in the name of universal freedom. The language Bush used reduced the debate to a contest of good versus evil, whereby the freedom loving peoples of the earth had a moral responsibility to combat the dark forces. That actual conflict did not occur against Iran gives some indication of the complexity of the environment and undermined the rhetoric. The side effect of such rhetoric is that, once employed, it was difficult to alter course, which was unimaginable within the

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Remarks at a Fundraiser for Governor Scott McCallum of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, 11 February, 2002, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library.

[21] The President's News Conference with European Union Leaders, 25 June, 2003, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library

administration. An American audience galvanized to action could be forgiven for wondering why so little seemed to change even as the rhetoric remained at fever pitch. As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq revealed themselves as something far less of a reflection of the triumphalism of American strategic culture, the ghost of Vietnam returned, and the binaries so confidently proclaimed by the President rang hollow.

When addressing North Korea, there were seemingly two audiences: a domestic audience that was fully engaged with the Axis of Evil rhetoric, and the rest of the world. Audiences in Asia heard Bush wanting to "resolve all issues peacefully," albeit wanting the North Korean leadership to "choose freedom."[22] When asked to be specific to the consequences that North Korea faced when they broke agreements, President Bush invariably tried to tone down the responses and whilst stating that all "options are on the table" routinely stated that "the United States has no intention of invading North Korea."[23] This approach is no different from G.W. Bush or Bill Clinton. In fact, in an interesting echo of his father's "good will begets good will" approach George W. Bush found himself almost repeating the trope with regards to North Korea when he spoke about "action for action" when finally removing North Korea from the state sponsored terrorism list in 2008. In spite of numerous examples of intransigence, and not giving up their nuclear capability, the President did what his father could not - allow a concession.

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[22] The President's News Conference with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan in Tokyo, Japan, 18 February, 2002, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library.

[23] Exchange with Reporters in Crawford, Texas, 31 December, 2002; *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library, Statement on the North Korean Nuclear Weapons Program, 15 November, 2002; *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library, Remarks prior to the Swearing-In Ceremony for John Snow as Secretary of the Treasury and an Exchange With Reporters, 7 February, 2003, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library.

Again, this approach was in stark contrast to that carried out against a non-nuclear Iran. In a bizarre contradiction, President Bush employed military force against Iraq to eliminate a WMD proliferation threat, but chose negotiations with a nuclear capable North Korea.[24] It became clear that Bush's binary rhetoric was unable to change the world and that only one member of the Axis of Evil was actually vulnerable to direct military action, and even that invasion, thought justified by UN Resolutions, was opposed by a number of influential countries.

President Bush was able to look beyond such complexity in his efforts to clarify his main talking points and, over the course of his re-election campaign, Bush continued to inspire the world with a demonstration of a binary Cold War rhetoric, reminiscent of Vietnam, clearly linked to the American strategic culture: "If America shows weakness and uncertainty in this decade, the world will drift towards tragedy. This will not happen on my watch." and "The nation is strong and confident in the cause of freedom. We know that freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to every man and woman who lives in this world."[25]

The invocations of freedom and democracy throughout his speeches highlight the belief in a universality of certain values, again echoing Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech "I am anxious to work with countries to help make sure that the institutions, universal institutions of democracy become entrenched in society: freedom to worship, freedom of the press, rule of law."[26]

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[24] Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, 28 January, 2003, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library.
[25] Remarks in Reno, Nevada, 18 June, 2004, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library.
[26] Remarks in a Discussion with Young Leaders in Brasilia, Brazil, 6 November, 2005, *The Public Papers of the President of the United States: George W Bush*, George W Bush Presidential Library.

The rhetoric of the Cold War – pure binaries closely linked to American strategic culture promised much, but delivered little. Rhetoric did not match reality, and President Bush was forced to maintain his rhetoric, having no other choice, while pursuing much more limited goals. Intoxicated by the power of transforming the world by eliminating tyranny and advancing democracy, George W. Bush could not achieve his lofty objectives. The power of rhetoric alone was not enough. Indeed, the Axis of Evil that became the focal point of the War on Terrorism in actuality had nothing to do with the attacks of 11 September 2001. This represents one of the most tragic ironies of the 21st Century.

5. Discussion

Rhetoric is key to exemplifying strategic culture as the words of the presidents have illustrated. The rhetorical choices can influence and shape policy; and while strategic culture is not a sole source of explanation for why certain decisions are made, it is a powerful element of the equation. As shown, within the strategic culture an American predisposition towards binaries has significant consequences.

The use of binaries allows a president to simplify complex issues and arguments; particularly when there may not be the time to articulate all of the points. However, the strategic environment has changed from a static Cold War stand off to a multipolar mosaic of uncertainty and ambiguity. The post-Cold War world caused binaries to skew, if not obfuscate, meaning and pander to prejudice. [1] At worst it can create unintentional extremes, particularly when arguments are framed as good versus evil, which not only misinform but can also cause confusion and limit maneuverability when trying to negotiate. It can also lead to misunderstanding if compromise to an issue is sought as the use of binaries necessarily sets the argument out as stark contrasts with no shades of grey. This may leave a polity confused as to how certain conditions have come about and resistant to the process of resolution.

The modern world has further complicated the role of presidential rhetoric when looking at the reduction of complex ideas to binaries. A shortened attention span induced by information overload from social media, the 24 hour news cycle, and a celebrity obsessed society encourages simple binary understanding, but this has several problems. [2]

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[1] Judith Hicks Stiehm and Nicholas W. Townsend, *The U.S. Army War College: Military Education in a Democracy* (Temple: University Press, 2002), 6

[2] An irony of the 24 hour news cycle is that rather than allowing greater depth into topics, it tends to regurgitate the same stories every hour.

Kevin Coe contends that the binary discourse of presidents is rooted in a "political culture dominated by mass media," but this is correlation not a cause which emphasizes and further conflates the consequences. [3] The mass media is an important element, but not the causal factor. The strategic culture of the United States has always predisposed presidential rhetoric towards binary language. This technique was highlighted by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who postulated that binaries do not have a "peaceful coexistence," but exist as a "violent hierarchy" where "one term governs the other or has the upper hand."[4] It may be useful for certain actors to use binaries to push political discourse in a particular direction, but such a tactic comes with a cost of potentially decreasing trust and disengagement. Adrian Carr and Lisa Zanetti have argued that binaries are "a struggle for predominance. . . . if one position is right then the other is wrong."[5] Further, Jean Baudrillard has argued that in "hyper-reality" the collapse of segmenting categories into merely positive and negative removes the 'real' from the debate.[6] This association with binary language can lead to a new 'reality' constructed through rhetoric where reductionism allows complex ideas to be presented as two sides of a coin. The danger here, as Eisenhower and Reagan, in particular, found out, is that when the veil is removed, a crisis of confidence can be created amongst the domestic audience. The shock can be all the greater due to the characteristics of American strategic culture.

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[3] Coe et al, 234-252

[4] Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (A. Bass, Trans), (Chicago: University Press, 1981), 41.

[5] Adrian Carr, Lisa A. Zanetti, "Metatheorizing the dialectic of the self and other: The psychodynamics in work organizations", *American Behavioural Scientist,* 43 (1999): 324-345

[6] Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War did not take place*. Ed. by Paul Patton (Indianapolis: University Press 1995), 24-26.

President H. W. Bush and Clinton attempted to move away from binary constructs and explain the world more precisely. In the case of Clinton, this led to equivocation and lack of recognition of where U.S. national interests truly lay.

President Obama was elected on a platform of hope and change, yet also found himself tied to a reality that was internally divisive and been shaped externally by his many predecessors. An apparent desire to not codify elements of policy in binaries has arguably made his role persuading the American public of the virtues of his policy harder.

For future leaders, an understanding of the limitations of binaries, but also their usefulness, is essential. Moreover, this needs to be connected to an understanding of the slowly evolving nature of American strategic culture. An expectation of certain beliefs and attitudes does not make American society weak, but it does challenge the understanding and interpretation of events in the world, particularly those that are complex.

Terrorism exerted a challenge across the presidencies examined and now exists in a security space between the military and law enforcement that does not offer a simple solution. In this case a reductionist approach, particularly following 9/11, has not created a safer world or led to U.S. success. The issue is that American strategic culture would frame a more nuanced approach as weakness.

Americans cling tightly to their foundation ideals. In an increasingly complex world, this may lead to an inability of the U.S. to deal with ambiguous situations. A U.S. in decline would challenge these preconceptions further. The American identity may find many of its most dearly held beliefs challenged over the coming years. The way that

America deals with these challenges and, the way that 'the other' is defined in relation to self will have a profound effect on the world. History does not suggest that the U.S. will lightly give up its mantle or accept a diminishing status. An inability to adapt to a multi-polar, trans-national and non-state future will only make the world a more dangerous place and be in the worst interests of the United States.

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7. Vita

Wing Commander Gareth Prendergast received his commission from the Queen in 2000.

Upon qualification in role as a Navigator on the Tornado GR4 fighter-bomber he completed several tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan based out of Al Udeid, Kandahar, and RAF Akrotiri becoming a Qualified Weapon Instructor (equivalent of Top Gun / Weapon School Graduate) in 2007.

He has worked within Defense Acquisition responsible for current and future air to surface weaponry including the Storm Shadow air launched cruise missile, Brimstone anti-armor / personnel rocket, and numerous novel weapon projects.

On returning to the Tornado, he successfully deployed the first UK combat air assets in support of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and subsequently commanded the RAF Tornado detachment.

Wing Commander Prendergast read for a Masters in International Law at Lancaster University and holds a Bachelor degree with honors from Keele University in International Relations.